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SUBJECT: MAYSAN: FADHILAH LEADER UPBEAT ON ELECTIONS

Classified By: PRT Maysan Team Leader Dan Foote for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a Maysan PRT reporting cable.

¶2. (C/REL MCFI) Ali Kadhem Khalaf, Fadhilah provincial party head and one of two Deputy Provincial Council Chairmen, told the PRT that future elections will strengthen democracy in Iraq as newly-elected local and provincial officials continue to improve their relationship with the GOI and have the opportunity to work within a stronger legal framework. Ali predicted that Sadrists will not make significant gains in Maysan in the upcoming provincial elections, but cautioned that it is still difficult to forecast the winners given the possibility of election fraud. Ali said he will not seek re-election to the Provincial Council, but will advise new Fadhilah candidates. Ali remarked that Maysanis remain eager for reconstruction assistance, but emphasized there is a greater need for project quality assurance. He agreed to assist the PRT with training program ideas streamlined through the provincial government that target those most in need. End Summary.

Fadhilah Leader Sees Elections as Key to Progress

¶3. (C/REL MCFI) During a November 25 meeting at Camp Garry Owen, Fadhilah provincial party head and co-Deputy Provincial Council chairman Ali Kadhem Khalaf told Team Leader (TL) that future elections will empower new local and provincial government officials who will inherit a stronger legal framework as the GOI continues passing important legislation.

He remarked that incoming officials would work to build a stronger and healthier provincial-GOI relationship. He added, "new blood will lead to better laws and better security." Asked if the Sadrists will maintain their majority in the provincial government, he speculated they would not make significant gains and hinted at the possibility of election fraud. He admitted that Da'wa's popularity appeared to be on the rise despite ongoing Maysani suspicion of Prime Minister Maliki. He commented, "many people are working against the Prime Minister, but he is trying."

Strongest Fadhilah Candidate

¶4. (C/REL MCFI) Ali told TL he would not seek re-election to the Provincial Council after serving on the previous two councils. Asked whether he would remain in politics, Ali responded that he would stay on to advise new Fadhilah candidates. He said Fadhilah plans to run 27 candidates for the 27 Provincial Council seats. He described the candidates as mostly educated, including engineers and educators. He added that seven women party members would be on the list. According to Ali, Fadhilah's best chances lie with Sattar al-Nuri, a local educator.

Reconstruction Assistance Improving

¶5. (C/REL MCFI) TL briefed Ali on the status of USG-funded projects in the province. Ali responded that he was aware of a majority of the projects, and agreed that cooperation between the PRT/CF and provincial government continued to improve. He again stressed, as he did in a previous meeting with the PRT, that training assistance should be coordinated through the provincial government and targeted to those who will benefit most. He added that he was eager to share his ideas about USG training assistance, and would welcome the opportunity to help the PRT identify training areas.

Quality Assurance Must Be Priority

¶6. (C/REL MCFI) Ali expressed concerns about the poor quality of previous reconstruction projects, emphasizing to TL that it was important that current and future USG-funded projects have adequate oversight to prevent substandard work.

TL told Ali he would encourage GRS engineers to coordinate with provincial engineers/contractors to promote higher work standards.

Comment

¶7. (C/REF MCFI) Ali was not overly optimistic about Fadhliah's chances in the upcoming provincial elections, and hinted at Da'wa's increasing popularity in Maysan, possibly a result of Prime Minister Maliki's targeted patronage of tribal leaders through support councils. (Note: Sheikh Sa'adoun, leader of the influential Bani Lam tribe in northern Maysan, told TL recently that Da'wa will make gains

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in the elections, and that PM Maliki has exhibited strong leadership. End Note.) However, the Maysani political situation remains unclear given the tight-lipped nature of party leaders about their chances -- and those of other parties -- in the provincial elections. End Comment.

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